

BUILDING FUTURE BOARDS



Identifying people who have the potential to lead is a key role for current board members. Learn how to assess and recruit candidates.

BY DONNA FRENCH DUNN, CAE

SAY THE WORD "FIDUCIARY" and most people think of money. But that word, as it applies to members of a board of directors, means "to hold in trust."

That trust obligates you to plan for the organization's future, including the future composition of the board. It seems a little odd, planning for your replacement. Yet every board member is responsible for helping to identify potential leaders to move onto the board. You are in the best position to understand the context for future boards.

ASSESS PERFORMANCE

Where do you start? The best place to begin is with a self-assessment of the current board. The process should examine both board performance (its collective knowledge and effectiveness) and the leadership capacity and performance of its individual members. Boards function best when diverse opinions and perspectives are encouraged, dialogue precedes deliberation, and conflict is managed well. Your board's ability to engage positively and each member's ability to contribute should be evaluated. Where there are gaps or apparent missing strengths, the board should seek individuals to fill those needs.

Exit interviews with departing board members can also be helpful in ongoing performance assessment. Some members may be more willing to comment when they are leaving the board.

IDENTIFY COMPETENCIES AND CANDIDATES

The board self-assessment, combined with the exit interviews, puts you on the path to identifying future members based on competencies. The competencies are communicated to your nominating committee for selection of candidates, but it is your job to help identify those individuals.

Your list of competencies may vary, but here are some that many associations seek in board candidates:

- demonstrated leadership skills
- integrity
- demonstrated management skills
- team orientation
- positive attitude
- ability to understand constructive conflict
- capacity for forward thinking

Notice that "expertise in the profession or field" is not on the list. While professional expertise is important, the capacity to lead, collaborate, and engage are critical to success as a board member.

If you can't readily identify people with the competencies you seek, then your board should establish a process for developing future leaders. Most associations find it essential to develop a concerted, cohesive effort to identify rising stars, engaging them on task forces and committees. These are people whose faces you see at every conference but who you know are not participating. Seek them out and involve them. Reach out to those who are vocal in their dissent and who hold diverse perspectives. While their viewpoint may be different, they may have the core competencies that will enrich the board's discussion and deliberation.

You hold your association in trust. Keeping that trust means identifying the competencies board members need and developing a corps of people ready to move into leadership. You have an obligation to build a board that will maintain your members' trust for years to come.

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